



Public Hearing – February 22, 2017
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Robert J. Klee

SB 832 — AN ACT CONCERNING PREVENTION OF THE HABITUATION OF DANGEROUS WILD ANIMALS

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding SB 832. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) offers the following testimony.

We appreciate the Committee's willingness to raise this bill at the request of DEEP. This proposal, which we strongly support, would expand authority under Section 26-25a of the CGS concerning the feeding of wild animals to enable DEEP to adopt regulations that would prohibit or restrict the feeding of wild canids (coyotes and foxes), wild felids (bobcats), and ursids (bears), collectively defined as potentially dangerous animals, in the wild on private land. This authority is currently limited to prohibiting or restricting the feeding of wildlife on state-owned property. This change would expand the array of tools available to DEEP to address public safety issues that arise from the habituation of potentially dangerous animals.

Populations of wild animals that pose a threat to humans (especially bear, coyote, and bobcats) are increasing and their ranges are expanding. As a result, interactions (often negative) between the public and these wild animals are increasing. The feeding of such wildlife can reduce their fear of humans and lead animals to associate humans with food. Most notably, bears that routinely forage on human-sourced foods often develop bold or aggressive behavior towards humans, leading to home incursions, attacks on pets and livestock, or even direct threats to humans (note the reports of a black bear killing a human in New Jersey on September 20, 2014, and more recent maulings in New York on August 11, 2015 and in Maryland on November 16, 2016).

Currently, federal law pursuant to CFR Title 36: Parks, Forests, and Public Property, Section 2.2, Wildlife Protection, prohibits the feeding of wildlife on properties managed by the National Park Service. Both the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have extensive, ongoing campaigns warning people of the dangers of feeding wildlife. The Connecticut General Assembly's Office of Legislative Research produced a report in November 2012 (2012-R-0351) specifically addressing *Bear Feeding Laws in the Northeast*. As of 2012, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island prohibited the feeding of bears. Since that time Massachusetts, Vermont, and Maine have passed "no feeding of wildlife" laws. Across the rest of the country, California, Montana, Florida, Arizona and Washington State are among the other states that have "no feeding of wildlife" laws.

In summary, DEEP strongly supports Senate Bill No. 832 for its potential to reduce negative interactions between the public and wild animals.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact DEEP's legislative liaison, Lee Sawyer at 860-424-3332 or Lee.Sawyer@ct.gov.